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Stress and organisational citizenship behaviours in Indian business process outsourcing organisations

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KEYWORDS

Organisational stress;
Organisational citizenship behaviours;
BPO industry in India;
ASSET (an organisational stress screening tool)

Abstract This study investigates the direct effect of organisational stress (as measured through ASSET) on organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). A sample of 402 operators was taken from business process outsourcing (BPO) organisations located in northern India. The authors hypothesised that there is a negative relationship between organisational stress and OCBs. Results of multiple regression analysis showed that stress had significant negative impact on OCBs. The implications for managers are discussed.

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Introduction

This paper is based on a study aimed at examining the strength of the relationship between organisational stress and organisational citizenship behaviours among operator level employees working in Indian business process outsourcing organisations (BPOs).

Evidence from the field suggests that the hours of work and working conditions in the BPO sector lead to the stress

syndrome, which in turn contributes to a 25–30% attrition rate among BPOs. Most of the young people who join BPOs attracted by the salaries, find it hard to cope with the long and irregular working hours (Data Quest, 2004). A meta-analysis conducted by Lee and Ashford (1996) on job burnout showed that several of the job demands (e.g., role conflict, workload and role stress) were strongly associated with higher levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. Studies in the area of working hours and mental wellbeing highlight the adverse impact of working longer hours on personal happiness, job satisfaction, workplace accidents, irritability, exhaustion, depression and relationships (Giga, Jain, & Cooper, 2009; Green & Tsitsianis, 2005). According to Head, Martikainen, Kumari, Kuper, and Marmot (2002) there is a higher risk of employees suffering from a psychiatric disorder if they are required to work at a constant fast pace, or are regularly faced with conflicting priorities. With increasing evidence of the impact of organisational stress (through sickness absenteeism, rising compensation payments and employee dissatisfaction) on businesses, it is important to meet the challenge by dealing with specific

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issues that cause excessive and long-term pressure (Cooper, 1999; Head et al., 2002).

BPO sector in India

India had a closed economy and monopolistic market conditions in the pre-liberalisation era. Post 1990, India has substantially liberalised and globalised its economy. With its large English speaking workforce, the country has become one of the most attractive destinations for business transactions. In addition, India has a large, young workforce with the appropriate educational background which makes it one of the most suitable destinations for outsourcing (Jain & Saini, 2009). The term outsourcing here refers to assigning one or more business processes to an external service provider, who takes over the responsibility of owning and managing these processes and delivering the envisaged service as per the terms of agreement. Thus, outsourcing enables an organisation to shift its responsibility for certain operations and/or processes to another entity (Jain & Saini, 2009). To the best of the authors' knowledge, there is no study available which focuses on the citizenship behaviour of call centre employees. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of organisational stress factors on the organisational citizenship behaviours of call centre employees.

Organisational citizenship behaviours

Research on organisational citizenship behaviours has been extensive since the introduction of its concepts about 20 years ago (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) are discretionary behaviours that are neither mandated nor compensated by the organisation. They include those behaviours that contribute to maintaining an organisation's social system and which indirectly benefit the work group or organisation as a whole (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). Theoretically, citizenship behaviours are thought to improve an organisation's functioning by "lubricating" its social machinery (Smith et al., 1983) and contribute to the development of social capital in organisations (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002). Research has found that the average level of employees' organisational citizenship behaviours is positively associated with organisational performance (e.g., Koys, 2001; Walz & Niehoff, 2000) and work group performance (e.g., Podsakoff, Ahearne, & Mackenzie, 1997).

Employees have various motives for engaging in OCBs. For example, some individuals might be predisposed towards helping others. Research has found that people who are characterised as conscientious (Konovsky & Organ, 1996) and with positive affect (George, 1991) engage in more citizenship behaviours. It has also been acknowledged that individuals may engage in OCBs to enhance their image in the organisation (Bolino, 1999). Finally, based on social exchange theory, research has found that employees who are treated well by their organisations reciprocate by engaging in OCBs. For example, organisational support and organisational fairness have been found to be related with employees' OCBs (e.g., Niehoff & Moorman, 1993; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Organisational stress

According to Selye (1956), stress is a scientific concept which has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too well known and too little understood. Linden (2004) defines stress as a process in which stressors (demands) trigger and attempt at adaptation or resolution that results in individual distress if the organism is unsuccessful in satisfying the demand. Response to stress occurs at physiological, behavioural and cognitive levels. Stress is more than just acute subjective or physiological activation and has potentially most deleterious health effects when it becomes chronic (http://www.idsa.in/system/files/book_dixit_intro.pdf). Health and Safety Executive (2004) defines organisational stress in terms of the adverse reactions of people to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. Studies have shown that workers suffering from stress exhibit decreased productivity, absenteeism, have a higher number of accidents, have lower morale and greater interpersonal conflict with colleagues and superiors (Cranwell & Abbey, 2005; Health and Safety Executive, 2004). By virtue of their demands, some jobs are highly stressful, such as operators in the call centre industry. Long hours of work, night shifts, high work targets and loss of identity are some of the concerns of the call centre industry in India. A survey report on call centre ailments by Data Quest (2004) shows a very high level of sleeping disorder, digestive system related disorder and depression as the top problems among call centre employees. In this study, stress is measured by using the organisational stress screening tool ASSET (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002).

Stress and organisational citizenship behaviours

Research studies linking stress with job performance and OCB (e.g., Bragger, Srednicki, Kutcher, Indovino, & Rosner, 2005) show that OCB was negatively related with work–family conflict. In another important study, Bolino and Turnley (2005) explored the relationship between a specific type of OCB—individual initiative—and role overload, job stress and work–family conflict. Results showed that individual initiative is associated with higher levels of employee role overload, job stress, and work–family conflict. Such a relationship was found to be stronger among women than among men. The construct of OCB was also linked with emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Emotional exhaustion was found to be a significant predictor of OCBO (OCBs beneficial to organisations), though organisational commitment mediated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and OCBO. After including commitment, the effect of exhaustion was no longer significant.

Organisational role theory

An organisational role is a set of connected behaviours, rights and obligations as conceptualised by actors in an organisational situation. It is an expected behaviour in a given individual's social status and social position (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role>). Further Levinson (1959) opines that role behaviour is what the manager does in response to the messages he or she has perceived and in response to his or

her own perception of the job. However, OCBs are conceptualised as extra-role behaviours that are not part of employees' role behaviour. Hence, role conflict may occur when simultaneous pressure arises from the two mutually incompatible roles (in-role behaviours versus extra-role behaviours) in such a manner that meeting the demands of one role makes it difficult to meet the demands of the other role. Role conflict was defined as the extent to which a person experienced pressures within one role that was incompatible with pressures within another role (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Thus, role conflict creates psychological problems like stress and frustration which in turn result in poor job performance, lower self esteem, inability to concentrate and make decisions, and job dissatisfaction (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Role theory suggests that people generally seek to behave in ways that are consistent with the way their roles are defined. Organisational stress may produce negative impact on OCBs as OCBs are extra-role behaviours. Moreover, organisational stress may create constraint of resources (time, energy etc) that might lead to an employee not focussing on any form of extra-role behaviours. Employees might not involve in OCBs to save their time, energy etc for other important commitments which may be the part of their in-role behaviour.

Social exchange theory

Compared to economic exchange relationships, which are more short term in nature, social exchange relationships tend to involve the exchange of socioemotional benefits (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001; Organ, 1988). They are associated with close emotional attachment, informal, personal and more transparent obligations. When individuals form social exchange relationships with their organisations, they tend to have higher job performance, more OCBs and weaker turnover intentions (e.g., Hendrix, Robbins, Miller, & Summers, 1998; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

Research suggests that individuals form social exchange relationships to the extent that they receive worthwhile and fairly administered benefits. Highly stressful jobs are more likely to violate both of these conditions of valuable benefits and fair administration. High stress can be perceived as a cost of investment for employees incurred towards their work organisations. Therefore, highly stressful jobs are perceived as personally costly and that may impede the development of high quality mutually beneficial social exchange relationships. This may be manifested through lower levels of extra-role behaviour in terms of OCBs. Also, OCBs are not considered as part of the job description and further, as part of the performance evaluation process. Social exchange theorists suggest that the absence of a social exchange relationship could engender higher turnover, lower commitment, lower OCBs, and so on (Wayne et al., 1997). The implied logical structure is roughly analogous to an "energy reservoir" model; either the energy summoned by the individual to cope with his/her environment is used for active behaviour, or it is focused internally with deleterious consequences (Karasek, Triantis, & Chaudhury, 1982). Based on the above discussion, we have proposed the following hypothesis;

Hypothesis: There is a negative relationship between organisational stress and OCBs in the context of business process outsourcing organisations in India.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample for this investigation was obtained from the population of all the operators of call centre organisations located in the national capital region of India – that is, from Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon. This region is considered a major hub of the call centre industry. The data were collected from 402 operator level employees belonging to five different call centres from this region. The questionnaires were administered with the consent of the HR managers of the concerned organisation.

The main task of these operators was to receive and answer the calls of their customers who might be calling from the US, the UK and other European countries. These call centres are open round the clock and operators worked in different shifts. The major demographic characteristics were noted in the following manner; **Age:** The mean age of the target sample was 24, with the range being 18–50 years. The standard deviation was 3.70. **Gender:** The gender composition of the sample was 68% males and 32% females. **Education:** Forty percent of the respondents had a graduate degree in Arts, Science, Engineering or Commerce; 60% had also done post graduate professional courses in the areas of computer, business and so on. **Tenure:** The mean time spent by the employees in the same organisation was 11.44 months with the standard deviation of 9.32. Some of the respondents had spent only 1 month and others 54 months at the time the data was collected. **Marital status:** The majority of the respondents were single; 80% were unmarried, while 17% percent were married, 2% were living with a partner and 1% were divorced.

Measures

The primary variables of interest were organisational stress and organisational citizenship behaviour. A self-report method was used to collect the data on both the variables.

ASSET, an organisational stress screening questionnaire developed by Cartwright and Cooper (2002), was used to collect the data on the *organisational stress* variable. The questionnaire consisted of 37 items which were classified across eight factors. The last factor consisted of only one item. These 37 items evaluated possible sources of workplace stress and job pressure. Some items related to home and others related to pressures in social life. The eight factors in the questionnaire were, *work relationships* (WR, $\alpha = 0.85$), *your job* (YJ, $\alpha = 0.61$), *overload* (OL, $\alpha = 0.81$), *control* (CL, $\alpha = 0.75$), *job security* (JS, $\alpha = 0.72$), *resource and communication* (RC, $\alpha = 0.76$), *work-life balance* (WLB, $\alpha = 0.61$) and *pay and benefits*. The first two factors consisted of eight items and the next five subscales had four items each; the final factor was a single item scale.

Following are examples of items from the eight factors in the ASSET questionnaire used to collect data on the organisational stress variable:

"My relationship with colleagues is poor" (WR; evaluates issues arising from contacts people have at work with their colleagues/managers); "My physical working conditions are unpleasant" (YJ; related to the fundamental nature of the job itself); "I do not have enough time to do my job as I would like" (OL; examines the time pressure and workload); "I am not involved in decisions affecting my job" (CL; measures the perception of the amount of control over the work); "My job skills may become redundant in the near future" (JS; measures the level of job security); "I do not have proper equipment or resources to do my job" (RC; measures issues related to resources available at work and effectiveness of the communication process within the organisation); "I work longer hours than I would choose to" (WLB; evaluates whether the demands of work interfere with the respondent's personal and home life); the last single item factor i.e., pay and benefits measures the extent to which pay and benefits are considered to be a source of stress.

Organisational citizenship behaviour was measured through OCB questionnaire, along with the newly constructed items, borrowed from the work of Bateman and Organ (1983), Smith et al. (1983), Organ (1988), Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994), Moorman and Blakely (1995) and Chattopadhyay (1999). Later it was validated and adapted by Jain (2003) as part of his doctoral work on a sample of 250 middle level executives from motorcycle manufacturing organisations. The scale had 11 reliable factors and 48 items. The factors were; *emotional support* (ES, $\alpha = 0.91$), *concern for organisational resources* (COR, $\alpha = 0.87$), *conservation of time* (CT, $\alpha = 0.77$), *organisational pride* (OP, $\alpha = 0.87$), *work mindedness* (WM, $\alpha = 0.79$), *civic virtue* (CV, $\alpha = 0.88$), *social and functional participation* (SFP, $\alpha = 0.89$), *altruism* (ALT, $\alpha = 0.79$), *sportsman spirit* (SPO, $\alpha = 0.85$), *individual initiative* (INI, $\alpha = 0.86$) and *generalised compliance* (GC, $\alpha = 0.63$).

Examples of items for each category are as follows: "I encourage coworkers to learn new skills and techniques" (ES); "I use company resources to do personal business" (COR); "I do not take extra breaks" (CT); "I show pride when representing the organisation in public" (OP); "I produce highest quality of work regardless of circumstances" (WM); "I read and keep up with the organisation's announcements" (CV); "I encourage management to keep knowledge/skill current" (SFP); "I willingly give my time to help others" (ALT); "I always find fault with what the organisation is doing" (SPO); "I encourage others to try new and more effective ways of doing their jobs" (INI); "My attendance at work is above the norm" (GC).

A summary for ready reference is presented in Table 1, which shows (a) the major constructs used in the study, (b) their factor-analytically derived dimensions with (c) abbreviations, the number of items constituting the factors, and (d) the Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicating the internal consistency for the respective factors.

All survey items were rated on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The table shows that all the factors of the ASSET questionnaire and OCB questionnaire have acceptable levels of reliability. Eight dimensions of the ASSET questionnaire were taken as independent variables and eleven dimensions of the OCB questionnaire were conceptualised as dependent variables.

The principal method for analysing the data was step wise multiple regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991).

Results

The *descriptive statistics and correlation matrix* are displayed in Table 2. The table of zero order correlation shows

Table 1 Summary of factors, abbreviations, and reliability of the questionnaires ($n = 402$).

Concepts	Factors	Abbreviations	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Organisational stress	1. Work relationships	WR	8	0.85
	2. Your job	YJ	8	0.76
	3. Overload	OL	4	0.81
	4. Control	CL	4	0.75
	5. Job security	JS	4	0.72
	6. Resource and communication	RC	4	0.76
	7. Work-life balance	WLB	4	0.61
	8. Pay and benefits	PB	1	
Organisational citizenship behaviour	1. Emotional support	ES	4	0.91
	2. Concern for organisational resources	COR	5	0.87
	3. Conservation of time	CT	2	0.77
	4. Organisational pride	OP	5	0.87
	5. Work mindedness	WM	3	0.79
	6. Civic virtue	CV	7	0.88
	7. Social and functional participation	SFP	6	0.89
	8. Altruism	ALT	4	0.79
	9. Sportsman spirit	SPO	4	0.85
	10. Individual initiative	INI	5	0.86
	11. Generalised compliance	GC	3	0.63

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations across variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. Work relationship	18.5	6.50	1																				
2. Work-life balance	14.0	4.21	0.44	1																			
3. Overload	10.7	4.32	0.65	0.49	1																		
4. Job security	12.9	4.19	0.50	0.38	0.51	1																	
5. Control	12.0	4.11	0.67	0.46	0.53	0.505	1																
6. Resources and communication	10.5	4.23	0.69	0.45	0.65	0.507	0.652	1															
7. Aspects of your job	23.3	5.78	0.56	0.51	0.57	0.518	0.512	0.522	1														
8. Pay and benefits	3.6	1.59	0.34	0.34	0.38	0.39	0.34	0.41	0.36	1													
9. Organisational stress	13.2	3.35	0.84	0.67	0.80	0.71	0.77	0.81	0.789	0.516	1												
10. Emotional support	19.8	3.25	-0.23	-0.04	-0.15	-0.0	-0.10	-0.16	-0.08	0.00	-0.16	1											
11. Concern for organisational resources	25.0	5.02	-0.40	-0.14	-0.27	-0.12	-0.24	-0.33	-0.24	-0.00	-0.32	0.27	1										
12. Conservation of time	8.1	2.67	0.02	0.04	0.08	0.047	0.07	0.03	0.09	-0.03	0.07	0.19	-0.07	1									
13. Organisational pride	24.3	4.06	-0.28	-0.17	-0.25	-0.24	-0.21	-0.25	-0.21	-0.17	-0.30	0.50	0.20	0.17	1								
14. Work mindedness	15.1	2.17	-0.20	-0.07	-0.11	-0.11	-0.15	-0.16	-0.13	0.02	-0.17	0.57	0.25	0.26	0.57	1							
15. Civic virtue	33.7	4.96	-0.16	-0.09	-0.11	-0.13	-0.10	-0.12	-0.11	-0.07	-0.16	0.47	0.09	0.15	0.49	0.58	1						
16. Social and functional participation	28.3	4.60	-0.12	-0.08	-0.12	-0.11	-0.07	-0.08	-0.06	-0.02	-0.12	0.44	0.07	0.06	0.43	0.40	0.59	1					
17. Altruism	18.8	3.08	-0.06	-0.03	-0.07	-0.12	0.00	-0.0	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.51	0.06	0.09	0.38	0.41	0.60	0.65	1				
18. Sportsmanship	17.8	4.60	-0.37	-0.24	-0.29	-0.13	-0.18	-0.34	-0.29	-0.16	-0.35	0.18	0.51	-0.0	0.25	0.21	0.11	0.09	0.10	1			
19. Individual initiatives	24.0	3.97	-0.24	-0.10	-0.12	-0.20	-0.18	-0.18	-0.12	0.03	-0.21	0.54	0.15	0.15	0.43	0.44	0.52	0.54	0.52	0.14	1		
20. Generalised compliance	17.5	2.37	0.03	-0.00	0.05	-0.06	-0.01	0.04	0.03	0.08	0.02	0.26	-0.02	0.10	0.18	0.22	0.35	0.27	0.36	-0.12	0.36	1	
21. OCB	21.1	2.24	-0.34	-0.16	-0.24	-0.21	-0.20	-0.28	-0.20	-0.08	-0.30	0.73	0.44	0.25	0.70	0.71	0.75	0.70	0.69	0.43	0.72	0.37	1

Note: Means and standard deviations are reported based on a 6-point scale for a sample of 402 participants. $p \leq 0.05$, $p \leq 0.01$.

that results are consistent with the hypotheses. The results show that all the factors of the stress questionnaire were negatively related with most of the dimensions of OCB except conservation of time and generalised compliance dimensions of OCB. The correlation between factors of ASSET and OCB dimensions was consistently negative, which supports the hypothesis.

Five demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, education and job tenure) were controlled in statistical analysis following previous researchers. Demographic variables were found to be insignificantly correlated with the overall OCB in this study. (These results are not presented here because of space constraint).

Table 3 shows results of multiple regression analysis. Regression analysis shows the differential impact of stress on different dimensions of OCBs. Most of the factors of ASSET questionnaire were found to be negative predictors of different dimensions of OCB. Work relationship, overload, aspects of your job, resources and communication and job security were found to be the negative predictors of different dimensions of OCB. However, pay and benefits, control and job security dimensions of ASSET questionnaire predicted OCB positively.

Fig. 1 shows overall strength of association between stress as the predictor and OCB as the criterion. The beta value of -0.307 is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It shows significantly high association between the two constructs. Stress predicts OCB negatively that explains 9% of variance in OCBs.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the relationship between organisational stress and organisation citizenship behaviour and found that the results were supportive and consistent with our hypothesis. The table of correlation

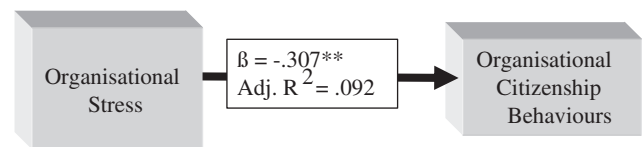


Fig. 1 Results of regression analysis (**significant at 0.01 level).

shows the negative relationship between organisational stress and OCBs. These findings have wide theoretical support in the literature from the field of general psychology and organisational behaviour where negative relationship was established between stress and performance. Some recent studies have linked components of stress such as work–family balance, emotional exhaustion, role overload and job pressure with OCB (e.g., Bragger et al., 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2003). The initiative dimension of OCB has been found to be negatively linked with role overload and work–family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005) which implies that those who take initiatives perceive higher stress and to reduce the level of stress they withdraw their involvement in OCB activities. In this study, dimensions of the ASSET questionnaire namely, work relationship, aspects of your job, overload and resources and communication were found to be the negative predictors of different dimensions of OCB. The present study has strengthened the findings of the previous work in this direction.

However, the results are inconsistent with Cialdini, Baumann, and Kenrick's (1982) work on *negative state relief model*. According to this model, prosocial behaviour is motivated by a desire to reduce negative feelings of unhappiness or dissatisfaction. Therefore, it may be

Table 3 Summary of step wise multiple regression analysis with the dimensions of organisation stress predicting the dimensions of organisation citizenship behaviour.

Predictor variables	Work relationship	Work-life balance	Overload	Job security	Control	Resources and communication	Your job	Pay and benefits	
Criterion variables	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	Adj. R^2
1. Emotional support	-0.265^{***}	0.056	-0.058	-0.002	0.049	-0.052	0.042	0.086	0.049
2. Concern for organisation resources	-0.367^{***}	0.053	-0.031	0.124*	0.019	-0.18^{**}	-0.089	0.164**	0.197
3. Conservation of time	-0.081	-0.008	0.097	0.004	0.071	-0.028	0.099	-0.093	0.003
4. Organisation pride	-0.147^*	-0.01	-0.05	-0.1	0.007	-0.053	-0.002	-0.04	0.081
5. Work mindedness	-0.162^*	0.028	0.047	-0.013	-0.052	-0.065	-0.038	0.065	0.029
6. Civic virtue	-0.131	-0.01	0.013	-0.077	0.016	-0.004	-0.012	0.003	0.012
7. Social and functional participation	-0.131	-0.01	0.013	-0.077	0.016	-0.004	-0.012	0.003	0.005
8. Altruism	-0.031	-0.026	-0.06	-0.168^{**}	0.123	-0.047	0.058	0.091	0.012
9. Sportsman spirit	-0.279^{***}	-0.082	-0.006	0.134*	0.178**	-0.226^{***}	-0.129^*	-0.014	0.180
10. Individual initiative	-0.218^{***}	-0.004	0.093	-0.14^*	-0.056	-0.038	0.04	0.078	0.06
11. Generalised compliance	0.024	-0.052	0.077	-0.165	-0.065	0.05	0.053	0.113	0.012

β Corresponds to the values when moderator variable was entered to the equation.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

assumed that involvement in any kinds of positive behaviour (e.g., OCBs) may be likely to reduce the feeling of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. However, the present study shows that stress reduces involvement in acts of OCB. Despite this, some factors of ASSET questionnaire such as pay and benefits, control and to some extent job security were found to be the positive predictors of OCB dimensions.

These findings can be interpreted through organisational role theory and social exchange theory. We may assume that under any kind of organisational stress, employees need to remain as productive as possible on their in-role behaviour while they may choose not to engage in OCBs. The understanding is that organisational citizenship behaviour is not necessary for an employee to maintain his/her organisational membership as compared to in-role behaviour, since organisations evaluate in-role behaviours. However, research has shown that OCB activities are also considered positively in the performance appraisal of employees (Allen & Rush, 1998; Park & Sims, 1989). The research however, does not specify the weightage given to OCB activities and what happens to employees if they do not perform on OCBs. This implies that OCBs are perceived positively by managers and are rewarded to some extent. But employees are not punished for not getting involved in OCBs because of their discretionary nature. On the other hand, if employees do not perform their in-role behaviours, they are liable to be punished. It would follow that employees would like to reduce their stress by not getting involved in OCBs and this would enable them to remain productive in their in-role behaviour. It is more likely that employees would like to avoid OCBs if the level of stress rises. The work pressure could make employees perceive even favourable organisational actions negatively. Consequently, social exchange view suggests that the absence of a social exchange relationship would engender higher turnover, lower commitment, less OCBs and so on. A perception of high stress disturbs this social exchange with the organisation.

Implications

Although stress and OCBs are found to be negatively correlated, the findings also indicate the positive impact of pay and benefits, control and to some extent job security dimensions of organisational stress on OCBs. According to Business Standard (2007) survey, employees of Indian BPO firms are satisfied with the job content, work culture, training, and appraisal. However, they were not satisfied with the image they had and even less satisfied with their salaries. The average salary hike in the BPO industry was 14.8% in 2007 as compared to an increase of 17.2% the previous year. The direct outcome of the fall in salary hike was the increase in attrition rates. The attrition rate went up to 20% from 18% in 2006 (Business Standard, 2007). This means that there is a good probability of increasing acts of citizenship through compensation management. A "good" salary can make employees positive towards a high stressful job. It can bring about a more equitable relationship with the organisation. A feeling of equity can further lead to the involvement in OCBs. Apart from salary,

BPO firms are using unconventional methods like teaching music and dance to tackle and beat stress among their employees (<http://www.rediff.com/money/2007/jul/03bpo.htm>).

Limitations and suggestions: This study was conducted in the BPO sector which has emerged as an attractive place of work for Indian youth. The sample population was quite young (averaging age 24) and had short tenure (averaging 11.4 months at their job) which may also be the cause of low OCB with regard to their high stressful jobs. The context of this study is very important to interpret these findings. An operator's job in any BPO organisation is high pressure in terms of the length of the working hours, the irregular timings, long travel, lack of involvement in social ceremonies and rituals, direct customer interaction and so on. The negative impact of stress on OCBs may be governed by the nature of the job and the industry environment.

One important limitation is of the self-report measure of OCB. This study is limited to BPO sector organisations; hence results cannot be generalised to other service and manufacturing sectors. For a comparison, a sample from varied population is desirable in future studies, with similar variables.

Contribution

Despite the limitations, the study yields important results in its own right. Organisational stress and OCB are important variables in organisational behaviour literature. The results reveal the significant relationship between both the variables. This study distinguishes those factors of organisational stress that may have positive and negative impacts on OCBs. Based on this study, we suggest that efforts be made to increase the level of positive forces such as pay and benefits, job security, and control in organisations; the impact of work relationship, aspects of your job, overload, and resources and communication should be decreased. Furthermore, this study also evaluates the relevance of the ASSET organisational stress screening tool in the Indian work context and finds it useful in a different cultural contexts. This study further validates the view tested in other studies done on ASSET questionnaire (Faragher, Cooper, & Cartwright, 2004; Johnson & Cooper, 2003).

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